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Prior Lake, MN 55372

May 2, 2015

A Message from the Mayor

It's Time to Invest in Prior Lake

I consider the 2040 Vision and Strategic Plan an essential blueprint for the City Council and my role as Mayor. Last year, we updated the plan for the eighth time since 2002. It's essential reading for all residents, available in print form at City Hall and electronically on the city website. 120 residents invested their time to examine the state of the city, and recommend initiatives to keep Prior Lake on course to stay a great place to live, work, and play for a lifetime.

While the specifics have changed over time, the themes of our Vision and Strategic Plan are the same: clean lakes enjoyed as recreational gems; parks second to none providing activity and respite for all; a thriving downtown offering a walkable district with shopping, dining, and services attractive to residents; open space and natural resources preserved and protected for future generations; a healthy business community making local jobs available for a growing proportion of people living here; a safe and secure community keeping life here as worry free as possible; a culture supporting relationships and collaboration with our neighbors affording more efficient and effective government, starting with a strong relationship with the SMSC.

The City Council should evaluate every decision we make to ensure consistency with the Vision and Strategic Plan. It's the right course for our City.

However, the City Council of Prior Lake squeezed the budget and tax levy for most of the past seven years. The result has been a lower tax levy per household in 2014 than in 2007, and even after the 10% levy increase for 2015, up only 0.6% increase per household for 2015 over 2008. The vast majority of households are paying lower city taxes today than before the crash. That was the responsible thing to do in the face of the Great Recession beginning in 2008. But, we squeezed too long, city services you expect and deserve have suffered, and we've placed the city's financial health at risk. Today, the regional and local economy is healthy, with unemployment in Scott County at 3.2%, lower than in the years prior to the crash of 2008.

To honor our commitments to service, restore the momentum to keep Prior Lake the way we like it, and to retain the characteristics we cherish as we grow, it's time – even past due – to make wise investments in our future. The framework for these initiatives is the 2040 Vision and Strategic Plan.

We need to start by restoring services that have been cut in recent years and the list below is just a starting point. These all need our collective best thinking, engagement and input.

- Add truck(s) and staff to achieve and sustain street policies and keep up with growth (snowplowing, sweeping, etc.). Late last year, the Council voted to adopt a revised plowing policy, delaying the response to snow events. That was a mistake and represents renegeing on an implied promise from the city to its residents.
- Add equipment and staff to restore parks and trails maintenance and cleaning and also keep up with community growth. We're falling behind, and everyone who uses our parks system notices the decline.
- Add to the police department (officers, vehicles, equipment) to keep up with growth and improve neighborhood support programs and community relations. Crime prevention starts in the neighborhoods and deserves greater attention by our police department. Traffic has increased substantially in each of the past three years, after taking a recession-driven break in growth for several years. The best way to address traffic safety is enforcement, and that means more patrols.
- Restore seasonal hiring to previous levels in our parks and recreation department, allowing us to restore programs, classes, and support, and modestly increase them to keep up with growth of Prior Lake.
- Add to the facility hours at Club Prior, not continuous consideration of cutting hours there.
- Add equipment and staff to Public Works to ensure that we can keep up with street and utilities maintenance for a growing community.

These decisions won't be easy and budget pressures won't abate, but you have every right to expect the city council to do the right thing.

Sincerely,
Mayor Ken Hedberg